The Power of the Properly Sequenced Subject Line:
Improve email performance by using the right words, in the right order
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#WebClinic
Today’s speakers

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Senior Manager,  
Research and Strategy  
MECLABS Institute

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Manager,  
Partnership Content  
MECLABS Institute
Experiment #1: Background

Experiment ID: TP 20211
Record Location: MECLABS Research Library
Research Partner: (Protected)*

Background: A regional marketing commission.

Goal: To raise awareness of local activities and events, increasing number of travelers and tourist spending in the area.

Research Question: Which subject line will generate the most opens and clickthrough?

Test Design: A/B split test

*Note: Test has been anonymized to protect partner confidentiality.
SUBJECT: Are you a fall foodie? See what’s going on in Boston this November.
Experiment #1: Treatment

**SUBJECT:** Clam Chowder, Lobster Rolls and More: Calling all foodies for Boston’s best fall fun
Experiment #1: Which subject line will win?

**Control**

**SUBJECT:** Are you a fall foodie? See what’s going on in Boston this November

**Treatment**

**SUBJECT:** Clam Chowder, Lobster Rolls and More: Calling all foodies for Boston’s best fall fun

10% Opens
Experiment #1: Results

10% Relative increase in opens
*Treatment resulted in a 10% increase in email opens.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Open Rate</th>
<th>Relative Difference</th>
<th>Level of Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Experiment #1: Results

**15% Relative increase in clickthrough rate**

*Treatment resulted in a 10% increase in clickthrough.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Relative Difference</th>
<th>Level of Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experiment #2: Background

**Experiment ID:** TP 20219  
**Record Location:** MECLABS Research Library  
**Research Partner:** *(Protected)*

**Background:** A regional marketing commission.

**Goal:** To raise awareness of local activities and events, increasing number of travelers and tourist spending in the area.

**Research Question:** Which subject line will generate the most opens and clickthrough?

**Test Design:** A/B split test

*Note: Test has been anonymized to protect partner confidentiality.*
Experiment #2: Control

SUBJECT: Book now to save up to 30% on hotel stays this December in Boston
Experiment #2: Treatment

**SUBJECT:** Holiday shopping, historic tours, Pops Orchestra concerts and more Boston traditions

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Experiment #2: Which subject line will win?

**Control**

**SUBJECT:** Book now to save up to 30% on hotel stays this December in Boston

**Treatment**

**SUBJECT:** Holiday shopping, historic tours, Pops Orchestra concerts and more Boston traditions

9% Opens
Experiment #2: Results

9% Relative increase in opens

Treatment resulted in a 10% increase in email opens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Open Rate</th>
<th>Relative Difference</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Experiment #2: Results

26% Relative increase in clickthrough rate

*Treatment resulted in a 10% increase in clickthrough.*

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Open Rate</th>
<th>Relative Difference</th>
<th>Level of Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What do winning subject lines have in common?

**Losing Treatments**

- **SUBJECT:** Are you a fall foodie? See what’s going on in Boston this November
- **SUBJECT:** Book now to save up to 30% on hotel stays this December in Boston

**Winning Treatments**

- **SUBJECT:** Clam Chowder, Lobster Rolls and More: Calling all foodies for Boston’s best fall fun
- **SUBJECT:** Holiday shopping, historic tours, Pops Orchestra concerts and more Boston traditions

Why?
Email is still vital

• 91% of U.S. consumers check their email daily, compared to 50% for social media.

• The growth of active email accounts is projected to significantly outpace the growth of active social media accounts for the rest of the decade.

• 82% of smartphone users read email throughout the day on their devices.
Email is still vital

• A recent MarketingSherpa survey found that the majority of consumers prefer to be contacted via email.

• 81% of U.S. digital shoppers surveyed said they were at least somewhat likely to make additional purchases as a result of targeted emails.

• HubSpot research revealed that 66% of U.S. consumers have made a purchase as a direct result of email marketing.
Email is still vital

• MarketingSherpa research found that businesses sending over 100,000 emails per month enjoy a **94% return on investment**. Companies sending under 100,000 emails per month see a **139%** return.

• **Email is 40 times more effective** at acquiring new customers than Facebook & Twitter (McKinsey & Company).

• **Email is the most effective channel** in terms of customer retention (HubSpot).

• **Email yields a similar response rate to direct mail**, at 1/100th the cost.
Today’s focus

Today, we will be looking at three simple observations from winning treatments that can be leveraged to strengthen our own subject lines.

**SUBJECT:** Are you a fall foodie? See what’s going on in Boston this November

**SUBJECT:** Book now to save up to 30% on hotel stays this December in Boston

**SUBJECT:** Clam Chowder, Lobster Rolls and More: Calling all foodies for Boston’s best fall fun

**SUBJECT:** Holiday shopping, historic tours, Pops Orchestra concerts and more Boston traditions
Key observations

1. **Observation #1**: The winning treatments both leverage words that are specific and tangible, rather than vague or “salesy.”
Experiment #1:

**Control**

**SUBJECT:** Are you a fall foodie? See what’s going on in Boston this November

- Confusing
- Vague

**Treatment**

**SUBJECT:** Clam Chowder, Lobster Rolls and More: Calling all foodies for Boston’s best fall fun

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Experiment #1:

Control

SUBJECT: Are you a fall foodie? See what’s going on in Boston this November

Treatment

SUBJECT: Clam Chowder, Lobster Rolls, and More: Calling all foodies for Boston’s best fall fun

- Confusing
- Vague
- Tangible
- Clear
Experiment #2:

Subject: Book now to save up to 30% on hotel stays this December in Boston

- Salesy
- Ambiguous
Experiment #2:

**Control**

**SUBJECT:** Book now to save up to 30% on hotel stays this December in Boston

- Salesy
- Ambiguous

**Treatment**

**SUBJECT:** Holiday shopping, historic tours, Pops Orchestra concerts and more Boston traditions

- Specific
- Valuable
Customers respond to clarity

Additional research

- A MarketingSherpa study tested **20 different subject lines across 45,000 email sends**. Clear subject lines greatly outperformed creative subject lines across all channels:

  - **617%** Site traffic
  - **315%** Tweets
  - **331%** Likes
  - **1,107%** Comments
  - **366%** Email subscription

- **541%** Average across all channels
Subject Lines: Choosing your words

NOT THESE

✗ Hey! Check this out!
✗ Interested in optimization? Take a look inside ...
✗ Hurry [name], this offer won’t last!
✗ Order Now: Buy our supplements to start losing weight

BUT THESE

✓ Grow Your Email List 99% Faster: How one site did it
✓ 6 Actions to Lift Clickthroughs: New data
✓ 43 Free Animated GIFs for Your Email Campaign
✓ Look Your Best: Get your free sample of our supplements inside
Subject Lines: Choosing your words

NOT THESE

× Hey! Check this out!
× Interested in optimization? Take a look inside…
× Hurry [name], this offer won’t last!
× Order Now: Buy our supplements to start losing weight

✓ Grow Your Email List 99% Faster: How One Site Did It
✓ 6 Actions to Lift Clickthroughs
✓ 43 Free Animated GIFs For Your Email Campaign
✓ Look your best: Get your free sample of our supplements inside

Many marketers worry about their ability to write persuasive copy, but the marketer’s art is not persuasion; it is clarity. Indeed, when the marketer represents an authentic value proposition, clarity is persuasion.

Source: Marketer as Philosopher – Reflection #9
Key observations

1. **Observation #1**: Both winning treatments leverage words that are specific and tangible, rather than vague or “salesy.”

2. **Observation #2**: Both winning treatments leverage a similar sequence of thought. They both lead with what the customer “gets” rather than what the customer must “do.”

3. **Observation #3**: Furthermore, the “ask” (an open) in both winning subject lines is implicit rather than explicit.
The Properly Sequenced Subject Line: Experiment 2

*Losing treatment*

**SUBJECT:** Book now to save up to 30% on hotel stays this December in Boston

*Winning treatment*

**SUBJECT:** Holiday shopping, historic tours, Pops Orchestra concerts and more Boston traditions

9% Opens

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The Properly Sequenced Subject Line: Experiment 1

**Losing treatment**

**SUBJECT:** Are you a fall foodie? See what’s going on in Boston this November

**Winning treatment**

**SUBJECT:** Clam Chowder, Lobster Rolls and More: Calling all foodies for Boston’s best fall fun

10% Opens

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Lead with value, not with an ask

Additional research

• Epsilon studied over 500 million emails and found that **point-first, informative subject lines had significantly greater impact** than variation in length.

• 40% of all emails are now opened on mobile devices, so the **first 20 to 30 characters must count**.

• Point-of-value should be introduced **within the first two words** in order to maximize results (MarketingSherpa).
Real world examples

**NOT THIS**

**SUBJECT:** Get the NEW [Name] for 50% off

**BUT THIS**

**SUBJECT:** Save 50% on your choice of two new subscription options

33% Increase in Open Rate

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get the NEW [Name] for 50% off</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Save 50% on your choice of two new subscription options</strong></td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td><strong>32.7%</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#WebClinic
Real world examples

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<tr>
<td>Buying or Refinancing? Check out [Name]</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own your home sooner with free biweekly payments</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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22% Increase in Open Rate
Real world examples

We are not optimizing subject lines; we are optimizing thought sequences. The most effective subject lines emphasize the “get” and imply the “ask.”

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<td>Own your home sooner with free bi-weekly payments</td>
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1. **Key Principle #1**: Many marketers worry about their ability to write persuasive copy, but the marketer’s art is not persuasion; it is clarity. Indeed, when the marketer represents an authentic value proposition, clarity is persuasion.

2. **Key Principle #2**: We are not optimizing subject lines; we are optimizing thought sequences. The most effective subject lines emphasize the “get” and imply the “ask.”
Checklist: Crafting effective subject lines

- Are your words specific, rather than vague?
- Does your subject line emphasize clarity over persuasion?
- Does your subject line represent an authentic value proposition?
- Is your subject line point-first?
- Do you lead with the “get”?
- Is the point-of-value introduced in the first two words?
- Is the logical next step in the thought sequence to open the email?
Email Messaging
Online Certification Course

- Learn how to optimize your email message to **improve deliverability** and **increase open rates**
- Recently **updated content**, tailored to help you succeed in the year 2015
- Active participation through **interactive quizzes** and guided **live optimization activities**

To receive 50% off your certification, visit:
MarketingExperiments.com/EmailCourse
Live optimization
SUBJECT: Start a 14-day FREE trial — discover more

Company: Ancestry.com

Primary Audience: Potential clients

Email Purpose: Encourage free trial signups
Hi there,

I see you downloaded our Top Questions E-Book a few days ago, but have not yet taken our Managed IT Services Survey. We modeled this survey off the content in the E-Book, so it should all be very familiar to you.

This survey will help you get a better grip on your company's IT needs and whether our services could be beneficial for you.

It's super short, and will only take a few minutes of your time.

Thank you,

Trevor Akervik
Senior Director of Managed Services

© Marco, Inc.
4510 Heatherwood Road
St. Cloud, MN 56301

manage your email preferences
unsubscribe
SUBJECT: Get the money you need today

Company: Kickstand Lending
Primary Audience: Loan prospects
Email Purpose: Drive existing customers to open a new line of credit

Alyssa,
Great news! You are now eligible to apply for a new loan. Get the money you need directly deposited into your bank account the next day.

It's easy - simply log in to your account and submit your information today.

Log in to My Account

Sincerely,
Customer Service
KICKSTAND LENDING
www.KickstandLending.com
E-mail: cs@KickstandLending.com
Phone: 1-855-506-KICK (5425)
Fax: 1-864-336-7257
Business hours: Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time

*Funds are deposited as soon as the next banking day for transactions completed by 4:00 PM Eastern Time, depending on the efficiency of your bank.
Live optimization

SUBJECT: ☆ Psssst! Luxury Diaper Bags — Quantities Limited ☆

Company: BabySteals.com

Primary Audience: Mothers

Email Purpose: Product sales
SUBJECT: [NAME], Here’s the Answer to Your Last-Minute Holiday Needs

Company: SmugMug

Primary Audience: Current subscribers

Email Purpose: Increase sales of the Gift of SmugMug
Next Clinic: Experiment background

Experiment ID: TP 1548  
Record Location: MECLABS Research Library  
Research Partner: (Protected)*

**Background:** A national bank.

**Goal:** To increase the number of signups for new checking accounts.

**Research Question:** Which sales funnel will produce the highest conversion?

**Test Design:** A/B variable cluster split test

*Note: Test has been anonymized to protect partner confidentiality.*
Experiment: The customer

For this test, the customer for both the Control and Treatments have arrived at the homepage of [BANK] and clicked on the “Open in Minutes” checking deeplink.
Next Clinic: The Control

Checking selector tool

- Checking selector tool requires visitors to answer four questions before being given an account recommendation.
- Customers click through and are presented with a preferred package, along with a second choice.
- Customers must select the account they are interested in to begin pre-registration, or they can go back and change their answers or manually browse other checking options.
Next Clinic: Treatment #1

Three-product tab

- The checking selector tool is removed, and instead, customers are presented with three account options from which to select.
Next Clinic: Treatment #2

**Single-product**

- Single product email with “Open Now” CTA at both the top and bottom of the page

OPEN AN ACCOUNT IN MINUTES

If you would like to view all checking account options or learn more about a specific account, please visit the checking comparison page by clicking here.
Next Clinic: Side-by-side comparison

TREATMENT #1

TREATMENT #2
Which treatment won?
To see the results

Live May 13 at 4:00 p.m. EDT

Join us for the next live 35-minute Web clinic to discover:

- The exact changes that achieved a 65% increase in account applications
- Why each of those changes improved performance
- How you can apply the same principles to your pages
- Key strategies from the underlying theory of customer motivation

To join live, register at the link below:

MarketingExperiments.com/Motivation
See how you can conduct research with us

MECLABS conducts rigorous experiments in the new science of optimization. We apply our discoveries to help leaders optimize the financial performance of their sales and marketing programs.

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• Select Research Partnership Opportunities on the post-webinar survey

• Contact us directly info@MECLABS.com 1-877-635-0565